

When we see this kind of evidence, we know there is a flaw in the system, and that flaw might actually have its source in a person named Vladimir Putin.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. Without objection, it is so ordered.

OFFSHORE DRILLING REGULATION

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, on December 28, just 3 days after Christmas, the Department of the Interior and this administration sent the oil industry a belated Christmas present. They published a proposal to release offshore drilling companies from sensible rules designed to prevent a tragedy like the one we experienced back in 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oilspill, when 11 people lost their lives and almost 5 million barrels of oil were spilled as a result of a defective device called a blowout preventer. There were 5 million barrels of oil sloshing around in the Gulf of Mexico, much of which is still out there down at depths of 5,000 feet, where the actual well pipe came out a mile underneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico.

Of course, we know the economic damage that did all up and down the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion was some 50 or 60 miles off of Louisiana, but the winds shifted and started blowing the oil to the east. It got as far east as Pensacola Beach, and those sugary white sands were covered up with black oil. The Associated Press and UPI photographs went around the world. The winds continued, and it went as far as the white sands of Destin. Tar balls floated as far east as the white sand beaches of Panama City Beach, and then the winds shifted and brought it back the other way. People all over the world, seeing the photographs, thought oil was on all the beaches of the gulf coast of Florida, and they did not come. The tourists did not come.

Now, I haven't even spoken about the economic and environmental degradation that occurred throughout the entire gulf and the fishing industries. Of course, the administration has proposed to now do drilling off the east coast of the United States, including off the coast of the State of the Presiding Officer. A number of us have come together who don't think that matches with our tourism industry. It certainly doesn't match with regard to our fishing industries, but it also does not match with the U.S. Department of Defense's training and testing mission.

If we look at the gulf coast off of Florida, the only place it is off limits in law is the largest testing and train-

ing area for the U.S. military in the world, but if you go up and down the Atlantic coast of the Eastern Seaboard, you will see training range after training range, and you get as far south as the Central East Coast of Florida and, lo and behold, is that area of protection for not only the U.S. Department of Defense but for NASA and other agencies. That is where we are rocketing our satellites into orbit, of which the first stages have to have a place to land. That is where, when we had the space shuttle—and soon we will be rocketing American astronauts to the International Space Station on American rockets. Many of the first stages will fall into the Atlantic Ocean below, just like the solid rocket boosters did on the space shuttle when it launched.

So there are reasons not to have drilling platforms out there, but let's come back to the Deepwater Horizon oilspill. What happened was deep below the seabed, miles farther into the Earth's crust, pressure had built up and an explosion had occurred. The safety mechanism is right where the pipe comes out of the seabed and goes up 5 miles to the surface to deliver oil.

The safety mechanism is a blowout preventer, which is like a huge set of pincers which comes through and cuts off the pipe. If that blowout preventer preventing the blowout of the well is defective—as it was in the BP oilspill, where 5 million barrels of oil spewed out 5 miles below the surface of the gulf into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and rendered the havoc and economic damage it did.

In the turmoil and trauma that ensued, there was obviously a need in the Department of the Interior, in the Bureau of Safety, called BSEE, to change the rules to give additional safety mechanisms to make sure this wouldn't happen again. Lo and behold, there is now a change, and we are starting to see the first attempts at weakening those rules.

Sometimes the issue of regulatory reform feels abstract or arbitrary. This is technical stuff, and it is dry, but the safety standards created after the Deepwater Horizon oilspill are not dull and boring. They are life or death. They were written specifically to make sure families, like those 11 who lost their loved ones, wouldn't have to be notified again that there was a preventable death.

What are these new rules about? They are coming in on the blowout preventer, which is the system to control the flow of oil or to seal an oil well. A blowout preventer is what stands between the enormous pressure that builds up in the oil well pipe and the ocean around it. Its purpose is exactly what the name sounds like. It is to prevent the oil from blowing out into the sea uncontrollably.

It took several months to finally get that well capped 5,000 feet below the surface of the water. These are massive pieces of equipment. The blowout preventer for Deepwater Horizon stood 57

feet tall and weighed over 400 tons. That is how big that thing is. Then there is a piece of the blowout preventer system called a shear ram—a device with two blades that seals off a well in an emergency, and that is what failed to fully close in the BP oilspill.

What the Interior Department in this administration is trying to do is undo the updated standards for shear rams and blowout preventers, and it is trying to get rid of a required third party to certify the safety mechanisms.

Obviously, after what we suffered, it is common sense to have those safety mechanisms, and it means that for a third party to ensure the safety mechanisms by certifying that they are in place—it means that somebody other than the oil company needs to make sure their safety equipment is in place and functioning properly.

These rules require better training for workers, real-time monitoring of deepwater drilling operations, timely reporting of major problems with the equipment, and consistent testing and inspections to increase safety. These rules were also the product of a thorough and transparent discussion by scientists, engineers, industry representatives, agency officials, and the public.

It took 6 years after the spill for the well control rule to be finalized. The Trump Interior Department wants to pull a bait and switch, reversing the safety measures and giving the public a mere 30 days to review a highly technical rule. It took 6 years to develop this rule ensuring the safety devices, and now they have a rule to undo it, and they are going to give 30 days for comments. That is nothing more than a free pass to the oil and gas industry at the expense of everyone else, including folks who work on those rigs, who are going to have to suffer if there is another blowout. There are a lot of other things—communities, marine life, your State's economy, my State's economy, the Gulf States' economies. It is totally misguided and reckless.

Over the past year, President Trump has issued Executive orders cut straight from Big Oil's playbook. He has directed agencies to gut rules designed to protect the environment and the safety of workers if the rules interfered with an oil company's bottom line. That is what this one does. It saves them some \$900 million. He directed Secretary Zinke to reconsider the well control rule, which was finalized in 2016. That rule stemmed directly from what we had learned in the investigation of the 2010 BP spill.

By the way, the agency that issued this proposed rollback is called the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement. It is separate now from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management—the agency that schedules lease sales in the Outer Continental Shelf.

Before the 2010 spill, the folks who worked with the oil industry to auction acreage in the gulf were the same people who were in charge of inspecting the rigs later for compliance with the

safety standards. Talk about a cozy relationship. That is why one of the first recommendations from the National Commission on the BP spill was to split those responsibilities into two different agencies—one that schedules lease sales and the other that does the safety. That was a very important step, both to clarify the mission of each agency and to restore public trust in offshore regulators. Yet over the summer, there were reports that the Trump administration wanted to recombine these two agencies. Only one stakeholder group would benefit from that, and you can bet what it is. It is not the consumers. It is not the tourists. It is not the scientists. It is not the environmentalists. It is the oil industry.

Now the Trump administration wants to smack down more recommendations from that investigation. From marine biologists to chambers of commerce, I can tell you, the people in Florida understand how important it is to keep drilling off the coast and, where there is drilling, to make sure the safety mechanisms that were corrected after the BP spill stay in place. But that is not what is happening right here in Washington.

When the Interior Department released this revised rule last week, my colleague, a Republican Congressman from Sarasota, FL, said “It would be a huge mistake to weaken these safety regulations” and that if the Interior Department doesn’t rescind the proposal, Congress should intervene and codify the rules permanently.

He is right, and I agree with Congressman BUCHANAN, my colleague in the Florida delegation who has an “R” behind his name. That is why I plan to subject this misguided rule to the Congressional Review Act.

The Congressional Review Act was once an option of last resort. It was meant to ensure that Congress could override the administration if a rule were widely opposed. In most cases, the Congressional Review Act wasn’t necessary because if Congress opposed a rule strongly enough, there was enough consensus to pass a law to fix it.

At the beginning of this Congress, the CRA was a favorite tool of the Republicans who wanted to take a sledgehammer to the Obama administration’s legacy through the rules that they had enacted. In 2017, the Senate took 17 votes on CRA resolutions of disapproval on everything from bear hunting in the National Wildlife Refuge of Alaska to drug testing of unemployment benefit recipients.

I think this dangerous proposal from the Interior Department deserves the same level of attention. This proposal is open to public comment until January 29. You are not going to get 6 years this time. You will get only 30 days, and it ends January 29. I hope the public understands that and starts registering some complaints.

I hope, during that time, every Floridian remembers what happened to us

when the beaches of Pensacola were blackened with tar and oil and we lost a whole season of our guests—tourists who come to this extraordinary State of natural environment, the beautiful Florida beaches. I hope that every Floridian will remember—whether you were a hotelier, a restaurateur, whether you had the dry cleaners, whether you had the taxi services—when you got hit in your pocketbook; I hope every American who rightly has an interest in protecting our beaches, our oceans, our marine life, decides to write in and complain to Secretary Zinke exactly what he is putting at risk with this proposal.

The Interior Department claims the revised proposal will lessen “unnecessary regulatory burdens”—those are their words—on the oil and gas industry, saving these businesses money. It is estimated it will save \$900-some million for the oil industry. What about all the other businesses that will be hurt by a spill if that blowout preventer doesn’t cut that pipe in two and seal off the well, which was the lesson learned from the BP Deepwater Horizon spill?

Do we want to go back and weaken these rules? The BP spill devastated my State’s economy, and 11 people lost their lives. Louisiana’s bayous were inundated with gooley oil.

I talked to two professors, researchers at Louisiana State University, LSU. They compared the critters that had developed in the bayous where the oil went into the bayous—the same kind of critter, a little fish that is about that big. Their progeny were stunning; they were mentally deformed. They could not act like normal killifish. It is a little fish about that big. They compared it to the bays and the bayous where those killifish hatched and grew in waters without oil sloshing around in those waters. For 87 days, 5 million barrels of oil gushed.

I bet folks don’t even realize there is a spill that is happening right now. As a matter of fact, it has been leaking for 13 years. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan toppled an offshore drilling platform owned by Taylor Energy. Because of the way the platform slid, several of the wells were buried and have yet to be plugged.

We all know it is not a question of if there will be another spill but when—and, oh, by the way, the one that has been going on since 2004. How catastrophic will the next one be? Is it going to be off of the Carolinas? Is it going to be off of Virginia, with all of our military fleet in Norfolk? Is it going to be off of Jacksonville and Mayport, as well as the subbase for our Trident submarines? Is it going to be off of Canaveral, where our commercial government rockets are launched into space, dropping first stages, and where the testing for the Trident submarine that is based in Georgia is done, with the telemetry on the Air Force Eastern Test Range? That is why more than 41,000 businesses on the Atlantic coast

have expressed opposition to drilling in the Atlantic Ocean, and that is why NASA doesn’t want drilling anywhere near the Kennedy Space Center. That is why the Department of Defense has said, time and again, that we should protect and extend the moratorium on drilling in the eastern gulf.

In 2006, bipartisan Senator Mel Martinez, a Republican from Florida, and I passed a moratorium for the eastern Gulf of Mexico, off of Florida, because of the military as well as all of the environmental things I have talked about.

Just at the end of last year, the Air Force came to us. It wants to put \$60 million of new improvements for exquisite telemetry, as we are testing some of our most sophisticated weapons systems in the gulf testing range, which is the Gulf of Mexico, off of Florida, but they don’t want to make that investment of \$60 million to upgrade all of the telemetry unless they have the assurance it is going to be off limits to oil drilling, not just until 2022, which is in the law, but extended another 5 years until 2027.

We cannot get it done. This Senator tried to get it into the Defense bill—an appropriate place. The Acting President pro tempore serves on that distinguished committee, the Armed Services Committee, which is led by JOHN MCCAIN. We couldn’t get it done because of oil interests not wanting to give the Air Force the security that its \$60 million investment on advanced telemetry would be protected for not 5 years from now but 10 years from now.

The only reason the administration wants to take the time to write a new one is, the oil industry wants it to open up a whole lot more acreage to drilling and not just in the gulf; it wants the entire Outer Continental Shelf of the United States—on the west coast and from New Jersey south, as one goes down the States, including the ones I have already mentioned in the Southeastern United States—Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida.

I don’t think we should expose even 1 acre of Federal waters to drilling until we have strong safety standards in place to protect against another spill, to protect the workers from losing their lives ever again, to protect the environment, to protect the coastal economies that are so dependent on the beautiful beaches, and to protect the national security interests of our testing and training ranges.

It took 6 years to finalize these rules, and now, in a matter of 30 days, comments are out there to undo these rules. That shouldn’t happen. Will other voices in the Senate speak up? It is happening right underneath our noses.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX REFORM BILL AND WORK BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, many recall that Christmas came a little early this year—or, I should say, last month—as we delivered comprehensive tax reform to the American people—a historic overhaul of our Nation's Tax Code and the first since 1986, more than three decades. Since that time, the President has now signed the bill into law, and we have already begun to see signs of how tax reform is transforming the economic landscape across the country and making life better for American citizens.

The New York Times reports that job creators are eager for the tax cuts to take effect and that a wave of optimism is surging among them. That is their quote, the New York Times. They report that businesses are ready to create jobs and raise wages. They will invest in new plants and equipment that will bolster economic growth, grow the economy, and help to create more jobs and improve take-home pay.

It is not just the New York Times that sees optimism spreading. There are plenty of real-world examples that illustrate that as well. One healthcare and home products company announced that in response to the tax bill, it would award all employees a \$100 bonus for each year they have worked for the company. So if an employee has been at the company for 8 years, the average tenure, that would be an extra \$800 in his or her pocket to fix their car, repair a water heater, or replace carpets in their living room.

Two telecom giants recently announced even larger bonuses for hundreds of thousands of their employees, raises of \$1,000 each. Now, it may be that these companies are getting ahead of the game, because in a tight labor market, where unemployment rates are relatively low and where economic activity goes up, we know there is going to be more and more competition for good workers, and that means that employers are going to be required to pay more for those workers in that competition for workforce and labor. So it may be that these companies are a little bit ahead of the game, but I expect to see, whether it is done as these companies have done it or not, in a low unemployment rate scenario where there is more competition for workers because more economic activity is occurring, that more jobs are being created and that we are going to see all workers' take-home pay increase as a result.

These companies have also said that they plan to increase capital spending in response to the tax reform we passed last month. Some banks have said they will raise their minimum wage to \$15

an hour and donate as much as \$400 million to community and nonprofit organizations.

One major airline in my home State of Texas announced that it will give all full-time and part-time employees a \$1,000 cash bonus and make \$5 million in additional charitable donations. They have also said—because they believe there is going to be an increased number of people flying—that they are going to buy more jets, more planes to accommodate that increase in air travel. This is all good stuff when we are looking at getting the economy growing again and creating more jobs and better wages.

Finally, German economists recently released a study finding that the U.S. corporate tax rate will now sharply improve incentives for foreigners to invest in America—exactly what we wanted to happen. Of course, this will come at the expense of high-tax countries in Europe. So just think of it as their loss is our gain, but that is exactly why we felt it was necessary on a bipartisan basis to reduce what was effectively the highest business tax rate in the world, at 35 percent. That is why people like Barack Obama in 2011 called for us on a bipartisan basis to reduce that rate and to make it more competitive, and the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, and others, and Republicans on our side of the aisle all agreed that this was the right policy. Well, now we are beginning to see that policy pay off as a result of the bill we passed in December, which was signed into law on December 22.

I would say that all these examples are pretty telltale signs that the optimism reported by the New York Times isn't fake news. It is real. Tax reform is changing the economic landscape, paychecks are growing, and job creators are responding in all sorts of positive ways. I think that is a terrific way for us to begin 2018.

Now, for all of us who worry about what is going to happen to our individual paycheck, the good news is that the IRS is now working hard to update its withholding guidance documents and, once it does, Texans and Americans, in general, will begin seeing larger paychecks, more take-home pay hopefully as early as February.

Well, that is the good news. That is what we were able to accomplish at the end of last year that will hopefully continue to pay dividends in terms of economic growth and take-home pay and more jobs, but we still have a lot of work to do.

Over the next few weeks, we have a very, very full plate. First and foremost is funding the Federal Government and avoiding a shutdown come January 19, when our stopgap continuing resolution expires. It is crucial that both sides come together to ensure that critical government functions are not held hostage to other demands. High on my list is to make sure that we continue to fund our national security and the Department of De-

fense and continue to pay our warfighters and make sure that they receive the training and equipment they need in order to keep our Nation safe. That is just one of the items, but it is my highest priority.

The second is close to it, and that is making sure we provide natural disaster relief. This last year, we saw what seemed to be an unprecedented array of natural disasters—from wildfires out West to historic rain events like Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Louisiana, and hurricanes in Florida, the Virgin Islands and, of course, Puerto Rico. I commend the House for passing the \$81 billion disaster relief package last month, but with so many record-setting disasters this last year—first and foremost in my mind is Hurricane Harvey in Texas—we, in the Senate, need to take a little extra time to make sure that all of the varied competing interests are accommodated. In the coming weeks, I am going to continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that Texans whose homes, schools, roads, and workplaces were affected by the storm receive the help they deserve and so desperately need. We are not asking to be treated any better than anybody else, but we are not going to accept being treated worse.

We look forward to working together with our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico, in Florida, out West, and, of course, in Texas and Louisiana to make sure that we do our job and treat everybody exactly the same. The House bill is a useful starting point, but it is my hope that we can improve upon it and make sure Texas can fully recover and rebuild.

Third on my list of to-dos is an important national security program that most people may not have heard much about, which allows the Federal Government to obtain communications of foreign intelligence targets, which is set to expire on January 19. One of the technical advantages that the United States has over any other country in the world is our ability to listen to foreign actors and gather intelligence that will forearm our first responders and our national security apparatus, as well as others, to keep our Nation safe.

This particular law, which has been called the crown jewel of our national security by the Director of the FBI, is known as section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Amendments Act, an essential safeguard against terrorism and a valuable tool for gathering foreign intelligence, as I have said. We need to work quickly to ensure that it is reauthorized for a long term.

The fourth item on our to-do list is addressing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, or DACA. You will recall that back a few years ago now, President Obama decided to try to unilaterally issue an order providing work permits and legal status to roughly 800,000 children, now adults, who came with their parents illegally